

VZCZCXYZ0005  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #1643/01 1370006  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 170006Z MAY 06  
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7933  
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0658  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 7309  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0737  
RUEHUM/AMEMBASSY ULAANBAATAR 1222  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J2 SEOUL KOR  
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR  
RHMFIUU/COMUSKOREA SCJS SEOUL KOR  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SEOUL 001643

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

NSC FOR CHA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MNUC](#) [EAID](#) [KN](#) [KS](#)

SUBJECT: AMERICAN ACADEMIC SKEPTICAL ABOUT KIM DAE-JUNG'S  
DPRK VISIT GIVEN NEGATIVE PORTRAYAL IN NORTH KOREAN MEDIA

SUMMARY

-----

1. (SBU) In a May 12 meeting with poloff, Dr. Brian Myers, Professor of Korean Studies at Inje University, expressed skepticism that a June visit to North Korea by former President Kim Dae-jung would result in any substantial changes in the North's behavior or its return to the Six Party Talks. On refugees, Myers asserted that U.S. acceptance of North Korean refugees would not affect regime stability in the North due to Pyongyang's view of the majority of refugees as "undesirables." Based on testimony by refugees and other sources, Myers said the DPRK-PRC border appeared to be porous, and many North Koreans were able to bribe their way around domestic travel restrictions. He charged that it would be disingenuous for Washington to criticize the ROK's policies on the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) and other forms of inter-Korean economic cooperation after being cognizant of, and supporting the same policies, since the 1990s, even though the ROK's justification for them were flawed. Myers thought Seoul's fears of Chinese dominance over North Korea were unfounded, given China's own problems, and noted that the DPRK's "military first" had lasted far beyond what was normal for most agitative propaganda. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) On May 12, poloff met with Brian Myers, Professor of Korean Studies, Inje University, to discuss general North Korean issues. An occasional contributor to the Atlantic Monthly and the New York Times, Myers teaches courses on North Korean propaganda, media, and culture. His work on North Korea focuses on studying Pyongyang's ideology and worldview through analysis of its internal propaganda. An American, Myers received his Ph.D. in Korean Studies from the University of Tuebingen in Germany, and his M.A. in Slavic Studies and Korean Studies from the Freie Universitaet Berlin, Ruhr University.

DPRK'S PATHETIC PORTRAYAL OF KDJ, JUNE 2000 SUMMIT

-----

3. (SBU) Myers stated that a June visit to North Korea by former President Kim Dae-jung was unlikely to result in any substantial changes in the North's behavior, given the negative depiction of both Kim and the June 2000 inter-Korean

summit in North Korean popular culture. Citing as example the North Korean book "Mannam" (encounter), a fictional work devoted largely to the June 2000 summit, Myers said North Koreans portrayed Kim Dae-jung as a frail old man who visited the DPRK intent on making the North renounce socialism, only to be outsmarted and outcharmed by Kim Jong-il. Kim Jong-il, portrayed by the authors as having initiated "true" inter-Korean dialogue, subsequently duped Kim Dae-jung into accepting his demands for inter-Korean cooperation, resulting in an outpouring of South Korean support for the North Korean leader's vision of North-South relations that effectively prevented Kim Dae-jung from reneging on the June 15 North-South Joint Declaration. Such a portrayal of the principals of the June 2000 summit, said Myers, effectively demonstrated how the DPRK regarded former President Kim Dae-jung vis-a-vis Kim Jong-il.

#### KDJ'S VISIT UNLIKELY TO RESULT IN CHANGE OR RETURN TO 6PT

-----

14. (SBU) Myers asserted that, absent monetary or other concessions from South Korea, the DPRK would have little to gain from Kim's visit. The ROK, on the other hand, would find it difficult to bring anything to the DPRK in light of: (1) lingering negative sentiment among the South Korean public and the political right from revelations that Seoul had paid hard currency to Pyongyang in return for agreeing to the June 2000 summit; (2) Washington's aversion to outside money getting in the hands of North Koreans, as demonstrated by the recent financial actions against Banco Delta Asia (BDA); and (3) recent criticism by Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights (SENK) Jay Lefkowitz that the ROK's and China's economic policies toward the DPRK helped prop up the Kim Jong-il regime. This meant that "concessions" from the ROK would necessarily be less conspicuous than in the past.

The North would likely make a pro forma attempt to portray itself as a reasonable party, agreeing to vague language in a joint statement indicating that it remained committed to denuclearization. More importantly, Myers noted, the DPRK might announce it would return to the Six Party Talks, but its decision clearly would not be based on Kim Dae-jung's visit.

#### ACCEPTING REFUGEES WON'T DESTABILIZE REGIME

-----

15. (SBU) On the issue of North Korean refugees, Myers said the acceptance of large numbers of North Korean refugees by the United States would not destabilize the Kim Jong-il regime. Pyongyang would not care if a million refugees attempted to leave the DPRK, as the vast majority of those fleeing the DPRK were, from Pyongyang's perspective, "undesirables" to the regime; i.e., former political prisoners, criminals, and non-essential laborers from the outer fringes of North Korea. In fact, added Myers, the regime might even be grateful to Washington for taking away "problem children who no longer needed to be fed." He cautioned against taking information provided by North Korean refugees at face value, as many of them had realized that exaggerating or lying about their experiences often provided them with opportunities for speaking engagements with "certain interest groups." Recalling a former refugee's lengthy discussion on the lack of freedom of movement in the DPRK at a recent academic conference, Myers pointed out that the same individual had also described his current activities in North Korea and how easy it was for him to move between the DPRK-PRC border.

#### TRAVEL RESTRICTION EASY TO GET AROUND THROUGH BRIBERY

-----

16. (SBU) The former refugee's credibility notwithstanding, Myers said many North Koreans appeared to be able to travel in and out of the DPRK at the Chinese border with relative ease. Bribery involving hard currency was apparently so pervasive that North Koreans could get circumvent travel restrictions within the DPRK. Since state scrutiny of

bribery and corruption was heaviest at the top of the socio-economic pyramid, the DPRK's ruling elite might, someday, find itself isolated from the dynamic traffic of goods and cash across the Chinese border, while lower-ranking officials and ordinary citizens reaped the benefits, Myers predicted.

#### ROK REASONING FOR KAESONG FLAWED

-----

17. (SBU) Myers argued that the ROKG's justification for the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) -- to expose more North Koreans to South Korean-style market economy in the hopes of stimulating the North to change its economic policies -- was unpersuasive. The current arrangement for the KIC left open too many questions for the outside world, thus making it easy for critics to regard the project as a money funnel for the regime. From Myers' perspective, it was clear that Seoul's primary purpose for inter-Korean economic engagement was to prevent a sudden, unwanted Korean reunification, which necessitated propping up the Kim Jong-il regime. He also argued, however, that while objections from the United States were not problematic by themselves, it was disingenuous for Washington to raise them now, after it had known about, tolerated, and publicly supported the ROK's engagement policy since the 1990s.

#### FEARS OF CHINESE ECONOMIC INFLUENCE IN DPRK MISPLACED

-----

18. (SBU) On the issue of South Korean fears of increasing Chinese economic influence in the DPRK, Myers dismissed the notion that China was intentionally, systematically sowing the seeds of eventual economic -- and perhaps political -- dominance over North Korea. China had neither the frame of mind nor the wherewithal to form and implement such an ambitious strategy, as it was going through its own "identify crisis" of grappling with rapid economic development while

maintaining its party-dominated socialist system. Rather, Myers assessed, the South Korean concerns stemmed mainly from decades-old Korea-centric paranoia among South Korean conspiracy theorists who believed China wanted to take over the Korean Peninsula, using North Korea as a springboard. The truth, Myers argued, was that China wanted to deal less and less with both North Korea and the millions of ethnic Koreans in the Chinese northeast. This fear among the South Koreans was, however, a useful tool for North Korea to exploit as it played the ROK off against the PRC, the same way that Pyongyang had played Beijing off against Moscow during the Cold War.

#### MILITARY-FIRST POLICY'S SURPRISING LONGEVITY

-----

19. (SBU) Myers said he was surprised that the DPRK had maintained its "military-first" policy in its official propaganda for so long, pointing out that agitative propaganda such as North Korea's, which vilified the United States as the main enemy, would normally lose its potency after a protracted period of time. This was dangerous in terms of regime stability, Myers opined, because Kim Jong-il obviously could not go back to the propaganda tactic of presenting himself and his government as providers of necessities given the DPRK's current inability to provide for its citizens. Myers argued that the regime was bound to collapse if the main focus of the "threat" to the DPRK disappeared. In other words, because the DPRK regime's derived its legitimacy solely from protecting its citizens from American imperialism, its *raison d'etre* would disappear if USFK pulled out of South Korea.

MINTON